

Mayor Gary Leitzell: State of the City Address 2013

DAYTON: EVOLUTION AND PROSPERITY



Good evening. It is great to be here with you at the Ahiska Turkish American Community Center of Dayton. This “Welcome Center” is another great Dayton success story, and I would like to thank Islom Shakhbandarov and the Ahiska community for hosting us this evening.

The grand opening of this facility as the ATACC was November 30, 2012, just two years and six months after my first encounter with our Russian refugee population. This center represents the hope and promise that Dayton continues to offer.

Last year when we met at Belmont High School, I reviewed the events of 2011 and put them in context with five basic facts laid out in my first State of the City address. Those facts were:

- #1: We are on our own.
- #2: Dayton must reinvent itself to survive and thrive.
- #3: If we’re going to get anything done, we need to work together.
- #4: Dayton is evolving, and
- #5: Dayton will prosper.

So tonight, I want to go over the events of 2012 and review the last three years as a whole so everyone knows just how far we have come in such a short amount of time—In the wake of the most severe recession since the Great Depression.

Today, in Dayton, we are still very much on our own. State and federal funds continue to be slashed, forcing us more than ever to be self reliant. However, we have been able

to provide basic services without any severe cuts in staffing as we have seen in previous administrations.

We have been actively recruiting new police officers, firefighters and paramedics and have not had to cut out our sponsorship of festivals or the summer fireworks display. In fact, for a second year in a row, we ended with a budget surplus and just as with the 2011 surplus we are able to apply the dollars to technology, blight removal, building maintenance and infrastructure. We are able to use some of this money to remove burned out buildings from the streetscape that have previously never qualified for federal or state funds because the neighborhoods in which they are located do not meet the required guidelines.

Because of this ongoing success, I would like to take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge Dayton City Manager Tim Riordan for all of his hard work and financial wisdom over the last few years. Tim, thanks to you and your hard-working staff, for keeping us on the straight and narrow road to a prosperous future.

I have spoken in the last two years of our need to reinvent ourselves. After all, without creativity we cannot prosper. So let us look at just a few of our creative solutions that have proven successful in 2012.

We can start with some of the big things. This facility that we are in is a huge accomplishment when you consider the alternative. A city owned facility becomes mothballed as a result of budget cuts only to be acquired by several generations of New Americans who can teach generations of old Americans what community is all about.

This is absolute proof that our “Welcome Dayton” plan is working and if you need more evidence just consider this: In 2010 the Ahiskan population in Dayton was 150 families. In May 2012 it was around 300 families, and today it is in excess of 450 families. Facilitating the success of a group of people has inspired them to repopulate what was considered a dying city just four years ago. They are not only repopulating it. They are transforming neighborhoods.

I'd like to acknowledge Mr. Islom Shakhbandarov of the Ahiska American Turkish Community Center for working with and assisting the more than 450 Ahiska Turkish families that now call Dayton home. Islom, your leadership and love for America is truly inspiring and we could not have done this without you. You are truly a Dayton Original and I thank you for being a friend.

I attend the naturalization ceremonies every month in Dayton. We have so many new American citizens being naturalized that there are now two ceremonies some months this year. The numbers have grown over the last few years. From Jan.22, 2010 to April 18, 2013, 2,459 new Americans from 25 or more countries have been sworn in at the Montgomery County Courthouse in downtown Dayton, many of them residing in the city. (An average of 50 new citizens a month for 3 years.)

The site of our 2012 "State of the City Address," Belmont High School, made history during their class of 2012 commencement last May with 2 valedictorians of 2 different immigrant communities, African and Mexican, reflecting the generational changes in our city.

This is yet more evidence that "Welcome Dayton" is working. The fact that the city of Cincinnati just adopted a similar plan also proves that Dayton remains a leader in innovation.

Last year, Forbes magazine listed Dayton as the "Happiest City to work in," the third best city in the U.S. for increasing home prices and the "Most Affordable city in America." Four years ago, this same magazine referred to us as a "Dying City". We are also ranked third best in the United States for job opportunities. It seems that the tide has really turned in the last three years. Dayton is on more top ten lists than bottom ten lists.

The Dayton Metro Library got a bond issue passed on last November's ballot that grants them some \$187 million to "re-invent" the library system and design one for the next several decades. This is huge for Dayton. It is huge for the region and it opens the door to opportunities that may not have previously been considered or investigated. I look forward to seeing their plans develop and the changes this will bring.

Another huge accomplishment in 2012 was the announcement that \$4 million had been raised from the private sector for the kayaking feature to be built at RiverScape in 2014. Dr. Mike Ervin was the champion for this and deserves an awful lot of credit for making it come to fruition. Kindred Hospital completed its renovations and opened their doors for business. I want to acknowledge the Fifth Street Brewpub in historic St. Anne's Hill for launching their membership drive and building a community asset from scratch. Now with over 1700 members, they are the fastest growing brew pub co-op in the nation—yet another Dayton Original to be copied and emulated by others. The city took a chance on itself and launched a self insured medical plan for its employees producing favorable results that will save the city money in the long term. The city of Dayton received the coveted ISO 9001 certification for its Finance

Department customer service operations, the first city to ever achieve such an acknowledgment. Key Ads has relocated to a downtown location, acquiring a building that had sat empty for many years and transforming it into something spectacular.

Now lets us consider some other significant things that don't get as much attention but have an impact on people's lives.

Dayton is continuing to be a progressive and culture current community. We implemented a domestic partner registry to show that we believe in treating all citizens fairly. On the more technical and social front, social media use has opened lines of communication never before fathomed. "Likes" on the City of Dayton's Facebook page went from 1,000 in 2010 to over 18,500 today. This means we can communicate with thousands of citizens with the click of a mouse for FREE.

There is now an outdoor market during the summer which has impacted the lives of a few Daytonians by granting them an opportunity to try their hands at a small business. We found a creative solution to deal with roadside panhandling, which had been giving our city a poor first impression to visitors.

Some of our additional successes include the imminent launch of the Hollywood Dayton Racino in north Dayton and the nearly complete GE Aviation research center at the University of Dayton.

One of Dayton's long-time businesses is renewing itself with a major investment in downtown Dayton. White Allen is set to launch construction of a new Honda Store and to refurbish other buildings along North Main Street. This \$10 million investment in White Allen's future will bring a new and exciting gateway to downtown.

Establishing 3 year contracts with our unions went a long way towards stabilizing the City budget. It's interesting that none of these things that I have mentioned were happening before 2010. In fact I have a list of 83 things, some large, some small that have transpired since 2010 and have all contributed in some way, shape or form to the Dayton Renaissance that we are experiencing. This renaissance has velocity, and we are going to experience a myriad of new things in the coming months because people who care about their community, people who care about their city are coming out and doing things that make a difference.

The biggest complaint that I get these days is that there is *too much* to do. It is a good problem to have and one that I hope does not go away.

For the last two years I made it clear that if we were going to get anything done we needed to put aside political differences and work together. And, I am happy to say, we have continued to do an excellent job at working together for the benefit of our citizens.

I commend all city employees and the Commission for working together in 2012 to provide services and create the progress that we are experiencing. We all get along and agree on most things, and we agree to disagree on others. But even in times of disagreement, there are no sparks or fireworks on the second floor at city hall. None that I have witnessed anyway. I know this disappoints certain members of the media.

Dayton is evolving but we all know evolution takes a long time. Nothing that is sustainable happens too quickly. But we the citizens don't have two to five years to sit around and hope for results. We need implementable solutions now that produce a result.

For example, we know that education will be important to the future of the region. The "Learn to Earn" plan developed as a countywide initiative is being implemented, but while it has promise, it is a long term plan that won't produce results for more than a decade. In the meantime, we need to address the countless highly sophisticated jobs that exist here in Dayton and remain unfilled because we do not have people locally to fill the positions. Better and more consistent marketing of Dayton at a national level would go a lot further to solve the issue of unfilled jobs a whole lot sooner than a long term education plan ever will.

There is nothing wrong with the planning but we need to take action and get results while the plan is taking shape.

Our housing stock will never get fixed by just making plans. Plans will determine what projects and locations are the best ones to support with tax money but plans will not fix the majority of houses in the city. Increased enforcement and fining irresponsible people isn't enough either. Developing a process that gets the toxic properties into the hands of responsible citizens quickly is the ultimate answer. That is the real challenge that must be addressed and we need to be willing to try several means in order to find the few that will work best.

Recycling is working. Not only does it save the taxpayer money, make sense and reduce waste, the citizens actually like doing it. Citizens regularly comment on the fact that their recycle bins are filling up quicker than their garbage dumpsters, some even calling the collection department to request a second recycling bin. Happy customers are the dream of every company. In Dayton we are growing our base of happy customers.

Sometimes I have to repeat myself in order to get the right people to hear. Last year I posed this question:

Why not form a coalition of municipalities and institutions that supplies 3000 tons of recyclables to recycling companies and have them pay us for the materials? Could the revenue generated be used for environmentally friendly economic development incentives instead of tax payer dollars?

Beyond the fiscal picture, we are focused on the global picture. Education, resources and new programs are rolled out within Dayton Public Schools and require citizen engagement. Programs such as composting classes and the city's green landfill are becoming popular within the city. Daytonians are taking the lead, changing their back yards to change the earth.

There are some who say that our Priority Board system is broken and needs to be removed. I don't agree with removal. Priority Boards do need to evolve, and we need to help them. "WE" being not just city government but also "YOU" the community. Not just the residents, but also the businesses. An organized business association goes a long way toward helping a neighborhood take pride in itself. Educating citizens on how to establish business associations and neighborhood block clubs or associations can be a function of these boards. Organizing community events in neighborhoods that currently have none will help to grow those neighborhoods.

We are lacking one of the very fundamental things that made Dayton special before the 1980s—a sense of community. In bygone days, people sat on porches and talked to their neighbors. Shared meals and stories. This was lost with the advent of air conditioning, followed by cable TV. Then Nintendo, computer games and now hand held tablet devices with all their apps, YouTube videos and distractions. How many people these days actually know who their neighbors are? How many actually talk to them?

If we want to evolve as a city then we have to master the eons old art of communication that has disappeared from American culture in the last 40 years. Ask yourself how many people "Tweet" or text messages to people on the other side of a room? If we cannot have real conversations about real problems then we will cease evolving and soon everything will be decided by computers taking on the personality of the people who programmed them. Just as we urge people to "Get out and vote" every year. We need to challenge people to "Get out and promote" relationships. Relationships with their neighbors, relationships with local businesses and relationships with other citizens who we can agree to disagree with. People make a community, people make a city and people need to be more involved in their community.

The Dayton renaissance is happening. And I repeat, this renaissance has velocity and it leads me to the fifth point that I make every year at these speeches--Dayton will prosper. Four short years ago I doubt that anyone would ever believe that a so called "dying city" could turn around so quickly during a recession. How could this ever be possible? Again it goes back to the people who call themselves Daytonians. Daytonians are a special group. They know when kindness is needed. They know when to question things that don't seem right and they know when drastic change is needed. Dayton is not only the "city of inventors" but the city of "re-inventors." This city continues to be built on the currency of kindness and generosity, networking ideas with people sharing time, resources, skills and talent.

So how do we continue to prosper? That is easy. Without creativity, we will not prosper. Without creativity we stagnate and we flounder. Without new ideas and new ways to solve age old problems we cannot and will not move forward. Creativity is the new prosperity in Dayton. Let us consider some of the new businesses that have grown or opened in Dayton during the last 12 months. Beside Caresource expanding and creating more jobs downtown, we have seen development along Brown Street completed with a host of new establishments such as Day Yoga, Shish Wraps, Boogies Green Machines and more.

More businesses are considering Dayton, like PECo, which is looking at a unique opportunity on McCall Street, and MidMark, which recently announced their intent to occupy space at UD's River Campus, the former NCR Headquarters.

The face of Dayton's arts, recreation and entertainment districts is constantly changing and improving, providing more fun for our community and our visitors.

The Pop-Up shop concept has been a success with more businesses succeeding than failing. We expect two more openings this year with "Green Baby" and "Peace Pilates" opening before "Urban Nights" on May 10th.

We will see Agnes All Natural Grill soon and Al's Smokehouse and Cafe is already up and running in Downtown. New taverns will be opening with Toxic Brew, Riff Raff Bar. It seems that some businesses fail and others succeed and expand every day but in Dayton the buildings no longer remain empty for so long.

We are seeing new businesses being spawned by established popular businesses. Soon The Barrel House will join the success of Olive Urban Dive. The Mendenhall Family will expand the success of Blind Bobs across 5th. Street with the opening of their new restaurant Lily's Bistro. Entrepreneurs and nationally renowned foodies are re-

inventing the old Sidebar restaurant with the opening of Salar. Coco's has moved within the city and expanded, making way for the popular Meadowlark restaurant to bring Wheat Penny to Wayne Avenue. The expansion of the Roost family into the Dayton Art Institute with Leo's Bistro has added to the experience of a visit to arts exhibits and creative events, making daily use of an under used space.

Food trucks are generating revenue and partnering with other venues and making a creative alternative with their street presence during special events. Pizza Factory & South Park Tavern now count the iconic Canal Street Tavern as part of their family, giving new security to the future of one of the city's most prized cornerstones of music. The Rubi Girls have found a new permanent stage and club house to call their own, so they can continue their tradition of benefit performances to assist non-profit organizations in the area.

Arts partnerships such as the one newly formed between CityFolk and the Dayton Art Institute will keep the tradition of this vital program building community through culture. These are a few examples of the relationships between neighbors and businesses building and reinventing our city. There are others on the horizon, and let us not forget the historic brewery at Carillon Historic Park which has seen a major transformation under the guidance of Brady Kress these last few years.

We are seeing more public art on our streetscape. The donation of "Fluid Dynamics" by Bill Pflaum now installed along Patterson Blvd will draw attention to the placement of new sculpture in Dayton. The wall being painted along the railway at 32 Webster Street and the murals under the bridge at Webster and Third are changing the dynamic of the area.

All of these and many others show that private interests are investing in Dayton today at a rate that we have not seen in many years. And, very importantly, young people are creating businesses and contributing through volunteerism in numbers we have not seen in decades. Ask anyone who really knows downtown Dayton – the vibe has changed, we are getting our "pulse" back.

Take it from me, Dayton is prospering and it will continue to do so as long as we the people continue to support creative, independent thinkers in their missions. We need to continue to challenge ourselves and seek out and support the ones who will do the work, not just talk about it or plan it.

I said this last year and I will say it again this year:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a critical time in Dayton's history. In three years, we have gone from being called a "dying city" to being a city recognized nationally and even internationally for reinventing itself. We accomplished that by working together, being open to new ideas and not letting party politics and egos blind us to what needs to be done. If we are to continue to transform Dayton into a model city of 21st century innovation, it will only happen by maintaining our present course – because it's working. Are things perfect? No. Are things improving as quickly as we would like them to? No. They never do. But they are changing. And Dayton is better for it.

I am Dayton's Mayor, ladies and gentlemen, but you are the leaders. You are the ones who run this city. You are the taxpayers who help keep police on the streets and our roads safe to drive upon. You are the business owners and entrepreneurs who create jobs. You are the ones who are driving the resurgence and renaissance of Dayton, Ohio, and I thank you for all your hard work. Your creativity, your spirit and your devotion to this community are bringing Dayton back to life and making it better than ever.

By working together we are building a new Dayton, one that can be a model 21st century city. Let's continue to move forward and continue to make Dayton what we know it can be and should be.

Thank you and God bless.